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Lucia A Keegan 10/11/2006 09:50:27 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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UNCLAS SENSITIVE PARIS 06576

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ACTION: AGR
INFO: UNESCO DCM AMB ECON TRDO SCI POL ECNO

DISSEMINATION: AGRX
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: AGR: MMEADOR
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RUEHMRE/AMCONSUL MARSEILLE 1349
RUEHSR/AMCONSUL STRASBOURG 0193
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [EU](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH FARMERS AND RESEARCHERS DEMONSTRATE IN FAVOR OF
BIOTECH; OTHER BIOTECH MATTERS

REF: (A) Paris 6159; (B) Paris 5262; (C) Paris 2439

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1.(U) Summary: The streets of Pau, a large city close to the Spanish border and the heart of French corn production, were filled on September 20 with nearly 2,000 French farmers and researchers demonstrating in support of agricultural biotechnology. There were no counter demonstrations. Disappointingly, French media provided scant coverage of the event. End Summary.

DEMONSTRATION

12. (U) Demonstrators from FNSEA (the largest French farmers union) Jeunes Agriculteurs (Young Farmers' Union), ORAMA (Union of French field crop growers), and Collectif Prservons la Recherche (employees from planting seed companies), among others joined together in Pau September 20th sporting T-shirts with "Ras-le-Bol!" ("Enough!") to express their shared frustration with the political,

judicial and cultural anti-biotech climate in France. (refs a and B).

¶3. (U) Protesters, assembled in front of the local government office, denounced the political weakness of the French government's failure to adopt biotech coexistence measures (ref C) and systematic use of the precautionary principle. Protesters further condemned the feeble penalties imposed by French judicial authorities on those found guilty of destroying biotech property. Protesters also fought back against other recent problems including environmentalists complaints that intensive irrigation necessary for corn production is environmentally wasteful, and against the French government's recent suspension of authorized pest treatments for corn seeds.

¶4. (U) Protesters emphasized that modern agriculture and farm economy development is based on innovation. They made it clear that their mission is to produce and live from their production, while their opponents destructive acts are based on ideology and not reality.

WORKING COEXISTENCE MODEL

¶5. (U) At the end of the march, participants headed to an exhibition called "Mais au Futur" (in French, "Corn in the Future"), which is a working field demonstration of GM and non-GM crop coexistence. For example, Arvalis, the French public technical institute for crops, offered an actual small-scale cornfield, incorporating their recommended coexistence production plantings of buffer zones and refuge zones around GM fields. The two largest U.S. planting seed companies in France, Pioneer and Monsanto, had stands at the exhibition, offering technical information to ensure the coexistence of conventional with GM varieties authorized in France for production.

PIONEER

¶6. (SBU) Pioneer works closely with its French corn seed customers, providing input on production practices (including coexistence production measures), harvest and trade of its French customers. Pioneer does not make public the identity or location of the farmers purchasing and growing Pioneer GM corn seeds. To date, Pioneer believes this strategy has helped them avoid any crop destructions of their customer's fields. However, French authorities informed Pioneer that traders who purchase the harvested GM corn will find their facilities under threat (silos, fields) by anti-biotech activists, namely Greenpeace.

MONSANTO

¶7. (SBU) All GM corn grown in France contains the MON-810 gene event created by Monsanto, and several EU approved corn varieties contain this event. Various seed companies can commercialize these varieties, and according to Monsanto, the number of planting seed companies selling GM corn varieties will expand significantly in ¶2007. Monsanto hopes to at least double GM corn acreage in France in 2007 to 10,000 hectares (ha) from this year's 4,000 to 5,000 ha. Monsanto's strategy is to increase the GM corn acreage in France before there is any legal coexistence legislation, and they believe there will be none before 2008 due to the inertia created by the elections of 2007.

¶8. (SBU) French corn exports to Spain (including GM and non-GM) cover 50,000 ha. All GM corn grown in France is exported to Spain. Consequently, Monsanto believes growing GM corn in France up to 50,000 ha will be achievable.

¶9. (SBU) More difficult, by far, will be opening the French processing market to GM corn. As an interim step, Monsanto has approached French animal-feed compounders on incorporating GM corn into their products. According to Monsanto, feed makers familiar with using imported GM soybean products are more open to

incorporating GM corn products grown in France.

BIOGEMMA STOPS OPEN-FIELD TEST PLOTS

¶10. (U) French research company, Biogemma, subsidiary of the French planting seed cooperative Limagrain, confirmed its recent decision that, following several years of test crop destruction, it will stop conducting open-field biotech research in France. Note: The withdrawal of Biogemma, the only French commercial group conducting open-field test plots in France, leaves only public French research institutes and non-French private companies still conducting biotech research here. End note.

¶11. (U) Comment: Despite the actions of anti-biotech activists, including crop destructions and negative media campaigns, French farmers, with the help of their syndicate organizations, technical research institutes, and planting seed companies, are showing their determination to further use biotechnology as a modern tool to increase productivity. In a country where the use of biotechnology in human food sources remains very controversial, it was noteworthy to witness a large number of people gathering peacefully to defend this technology, and exchange technical information without ideological discussion or negative repercussions.

¶12. (U) The French national popular press did not report on the event (despite Reuters and the French Press Agency AFP reports), even though the national media consistently reports on GM field destructions and lawsuits involving activists and seed companies. The negative image of farm biotechnology has been fed by the media coverage, and consumers' perceptions will be difficult to change so long as the lack of balance in the media fails to provide exposure to the benefits of biotechnology. We will continue to promote the benefits of biotechnology through all channels in the Embassy. End comment.

Stapleton